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ABSTRACT

Helping disruptive students successfully complete high school and learn how to develop self-control is a challenge for the school, parents, and society. Some of the specific family characteristics associated with disruptive behavior in the classroom and school are examined here. Parents of 105 adolescent males, who ranged in age from 15 to 17, completed various surveys. Analysis revealed that the family variables of cohesion, conflict, organization, and expression of anger were all significant in being able to predict membership in one of the study's three groups: emotionally disturbed, "late starters" (i.e. those who had only recently manifested disruptive behavior), and the control group. Results indicate that the families of the emotionally disturbed subjects had more conflict, less cohesion, and less organization than both the late starters and the control group subjects. Both the emotionally disturbed and the late starters had more expression of anger within the family than did the control families. There appears to be a significant relationship between the male adolescent and his father. It is recommended that intervention strategies for disruptive adolescent students need to take into account family variables and that paternal anger be given strong consideration. Implications for future research are discussed. Contains 11 references. (RJM)

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Family Environment And School Behavioral Problems

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Abstract

Family Environment and School Behavioral Problems

Both the family systems theory and social learning theory posit a relationship between family environment and social behavior in other settings such as the school. This study examined the specific family characteristics associated with disruptive behavior in the classroom and school. Parents of 105 adolescent males who ranged in age from 15 to 17, completed the Family Environmental Scale and the Interpersonal Behavior Survey. Discriminate analysis revealed that family variables of cohesion, conflict, organization, and expression of anger were all significant in being able to predict membership in one of the study's three groups: emotionally disturbed, "late starters" (i.e. adolescents who had recently manifested disruptive behavior) and the control group. Implications for future research and intervention strategies were discussed.

Family Environment and School Behavior Problems

Disruptive students present difficult problems for educators. Walker (1979) observed that the disruptive student defies his teacher and ignores school imposed rules, structures and procedures. As a consistent rule breaker, the disruptive student spends a great deal of time in nonacademic pursuits usually leading to deficiencies in key academic skills due to his not-compliant, unmotivated, and defiant behavior.

Patterson and his associates (1975) who generally labeled disruptive students as aggressive, found that many disruptive students tend to experience greater difficulty in the mastery of academic tasks, learn at a slower pace, and do not spontaneously improve without specific interventions. Patterson (1989) has identified a number of students as "late starters," that is, they only began to manifest disruptive behavior around the time they enter high school. They distinguish between later starters who have a relatively short history of disruptive behavior and those adolescents who have a long term history of disruptive behavior. Patterson considered the later starting group's disruptive behavior as by-products of associating with deviant peer groups, while the behaviors of students with long standing problems are a direct outcome of a coercive style learned from the association of dysfunctional family relationships. Furthermore, Patterson suggested that late starters might also have experienced difficult family transitions or crises (divorce,

moving, early pubescence) which can disrupt parental monitoring and appropriate supervision of their behaviors.

This study examined the family environment in terms of three specific categories of dimensions (a) family relatedness, (b) family system maintenance, and (c) parental aggression. The family relatedness dimension used the variables of cohesion and conflict. The family system maintenance dimension used the variables of organization and control. The parental aggression dimension used the variables of parental expression of anger and general aggression. The purpose of this study was to identify which of these specific six variables were associated among three groups of high school adolescent males: (a) students who have a long history of presenting disruptive behaviors, and are classified emotionally disturbed, (b) students identified as late starters who first began exhibiting behavior problems in high school, and (c) a control group of students exhibiting no behavior problems.

Method

Subjects. The parents of 105 adolescent males (35 emotionally disturbed; 35 late starters; 35 control) who ranged in aged from 15 to 17 were recruited for the study. All students were white, from intact families, and were attending either a local public high school or an out-of-district placement in a private day school which works with behavior problem high school students. All schools were located in northern New Jersey.

Instruments. After parents were explained the purpose of the study, they were asked to sign a consent form which indicated that they were freely participating in the project (approved by Seton Hall University Research Committee). Each of the parents completed the Family Environment Scale (Moos and Moos, 1986) and the Interpersonal Behavior Survey (Mauger & Adkinson, 1980).

The Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1986) is a 90 item true-false test which yields standard scores on 10 subscales. Each subscale contains nine items. These subscales are divided into three dimensions: (1) the Relationship dimension which consists of the Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Conflict subscales; (2) the Personal Growth dimension which consists of Independence, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Moral-Religious Emphasis subscales; and (3) the System Maintenance dimension which consists of the Organization and Control subscales. For the purpose of this study, the relationship dimension and two of its subscales, as well as the system maintenance dimension and two of its subscales were used. These two dimension effectively measure how the adolescent and his parents are relating in the home environment,, in addition to how the family system is being maintained in terms of organization and control.

The Interpersonal Behavior Survey (Mauger & Adkinson, 1980) is a 272-item true-false inventory, written at a 6th grade level, which measures 18 interpersonal response classes. This test differentiates aggressive behaviors from assertive and non-

assertive behaviors and samples subclasses of these behaviors. Mauger and Adkinson have shown through factor analysis that assertive and aggressive behaviors are orthogonal and do not correlate.

The IBS is composed of the following indices of behavior: three validity scales- Denial, Infrequency , and Impression Management; seven aggressiveness scales- General Aggressiveness, Hostile Stance, Expression of Anger, Disregard of Rights, Verbal Aggressiveness, Physical Aggressiveness, and Passive Aggressiveness; eight assertiveness scales- General Assertiveness, Self-Confidence, Initiating Assertiveness, Defending Assertiveness, Frankness, Praise, Requesting Help, Refusing Demands; and three relationship scales- Conflict Avoidance, Dependency, and Shyness. For the purposes of the present investigation, only two of the aggressiveness subscales were used- General Aggressiveness and Expression of Anger.

Hypothesis

Measures of organization, control, conflict, and cohesion (FES-R) and measures of paternal general aggressiveness and expression of anger (IBS) are significant variables in discriminating among three groups of 15 to 17 year old male high school adolescents (emotionally disturbed, late starters, controls).

In addition to using a discrete multivariate analysis, the data analysis also used a discriminant function analysis to predict membership in one of the three groups.

Results

The results of the discriminate function analysis indicated that the measures of cohesion, conflict, organization, and expression of anger were most effective in correctly categorizing emotionally disturbed and control group subjects. This was true because late starters were generally midway between the control and emotionally disturbed subjects based on group centroids.

The relationship among the six dependent variables (cohesion, conflict, expression of anger, organization, control, and general aggression) with the first discriminant function was interpreted by evaluating the correlation of each of the variables (structure coefficients) with the one significant discriminant function. An interpretation of the structure coeffients indicated that the measure of cohesion had the highest correlation with the first discriminant function (r = .80), while there was also a high inverse correlation of r = -.71 between the measure of conflict and the first discriminant function. Additionally, organization had a correlation of r = .52 with the first discriminant function, while expression of anger had an inverse correlation of r = -.57 (Table 8).

The discriminating variables correctly categorized 56.19% of the 105 subjects into the correct categorization group. However, the discriminating variables were most effective in discriminating between control subjects with later starters and emotionally disturbed students, since 74% of the control subjects were correctly categorized on their group membership. The

emotionally disturbed students were correctly categorized 54.13% of the time and the late starters were correctly categorized only 40% of the time. The late starters were incorrectly categorized as control group subjects 37.1% of the time, and emotionally disturbed subjects 22.9% of the time.

The discriminant function analysis has shown that, overall, the late starters are between the control group and emotionally disturbed group subjects on the four variables of conflict, cohesion, organization, and expression of anger. In comparison to the control group subjects, the late starter families are only significantly different in the levels of paternal anger being expressed by fathers toward their sons. Yet problems in the home enviornment do exist and one needs to consider a combination of variables (i.e. conflict, cohesion, organization, expression of anger) even though taken individually, there were not significant differences between control families and later starter families.

Discussion

The current study found that the families of the emotionally disturbed subjects had more conflict, less cohesion, and less organization than both the late starters and the control group subjects. Furthermore, both the emotionally disturbed and the late starters had more expression of anger within the family than did the control families. However, there was no significant difference between the emotionally disturbed subjects and the

later starters' families on expression of anger. Finally, the variables of cohesion, conflict, organization, and expression of anger were all significant in being able to predict membership in one of the study's three groups.

It appears that any intervention strategies attempted for the disruptive adolescent student, needs to take into account these four variables, and in particular for the later starter consideration must focus on paternal expression of anger. There appears to be a significant relationship between the male adolescent and his father. A great deal of anger was expressed by fathers of late starter adolescents. Although the current study did not examine the adolescent's expression of anger, one might presume that he too must be quite angry and might express his anger through disruptive behavior.

Conclusions

There is a growing concern among educators with the large number of disruptive students in school settings. A number of studies have been conducted which have tried to gain a better understanding of why these students engage in disruptive behaviors.

The current investigation has suggested that there is some relationship between the family environment and adolescent behavior. The three groups of 15 to 17 year old male, high school students consisted of (a) 35 students who have a long history of disruptive behaviors and are classified as emotionally disturbed, (b) 35 students identified as late starters who first

began exhibiting behavior problems in high school, (c) 35 boys that never exhibited disruptive behaviors. According to Patterson, DeBaryshe and Ramsey, (1989), approximately one-third to one-half of all delinquent acts are committed by the "late starters" who are not products of a coercion process which may be found in families where long-term behavior problems exist. According to Paterson and his associates (1992), these late starters (1) do not begin their delinquent behavior until mid-adolescence, (2) have at least marginal social skills, and (3) when assessed at grade four, would not be classified as antisocial. Paterson has posited that the antisocial acts of these late starters are by-products of associating with deviant peer groups and are not the direct outcomes of a coercive interpersonal style of interaction learned from family relationships within the home.

Adolescent males who are "late starters," are more socialized than those who have long standing histories of emotional problems; they have also developed skills in relating to peers and in meeting academic requirements. Paterson and his associates (1992) have suggested that the late starters may be experiencing difficult family transitions or crises (divorce, moving, early pubescence, family illness, etc.). They are also likely to drop-out of the anti-social process in early adulthood and become involved in the world of work and family. Unfortunately, because of a paucity of research on this later starters group, most theories which focus on etiology issues and

intervention strategies are highly speculative. One of the goals of the present study was to gain greater understanding about those boys who are called "late starters."

The investigation of the late starter needs to be continued. Patterson and his associates suggested that many of these adolescents discontinue their disruptive behavior as they approach adulthood, yet there has not been any study which follows these individuals through adolescence and after they leave high school. Such an investigation could prove very helpful in developing early intervention strategies.

Helping the disruptive student successfully complete high school and learn how to develop self-control is a challenge for the school, parents and society. The more we learn about these students the better prepared we will be to develop programs for adolescents and families within our communities.

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Table 1

Zero Order Correlations among Family Environment Scale and Interpersonal Behavior Survey Scores

	CONFLICT	COHESION	ORGANIZ	CONTROL	EXPANGER	GENAGG
CONFLICT	1.00	-.67***	-.43***	.12	.46***	.27**
COHESION		1.00	.66***	.13	-.40***	-.25**
ORGANIZ			1.00	.20*	-.28**	-.18
CONTROL				1.00	-.07	.03
EXPANGER					1.00	.64***
GENAGG						1.00

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Table 2

One Way ANOVA Design for Comparison of Control, Late Starter, and Emotionally Disturbed Students on Six Dependent Variables

Variable	Between Groups			Within Groups			F
	df	SS	MS	df	SS	MS	
CONFLICT	2	118.53	59.27	102	463.71	4.55	13.04***
COHESION	2	176.70	88.35	102	519.49	5.09	17.35***
ORGANIZ	2	71.45	35.72	102	440.51	4.32	8.27***
CONTROL	2	12.13	6.07	102	283.26	2.78	2.18
EXPANGER	2	258.99	129.50	102	1512.00	14.82	8.74***
GENAGG	2	67.45	33.72	102	2636.40	25.85	1.30

*** $p < .001$

MEAN SCORES ON FOUR DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

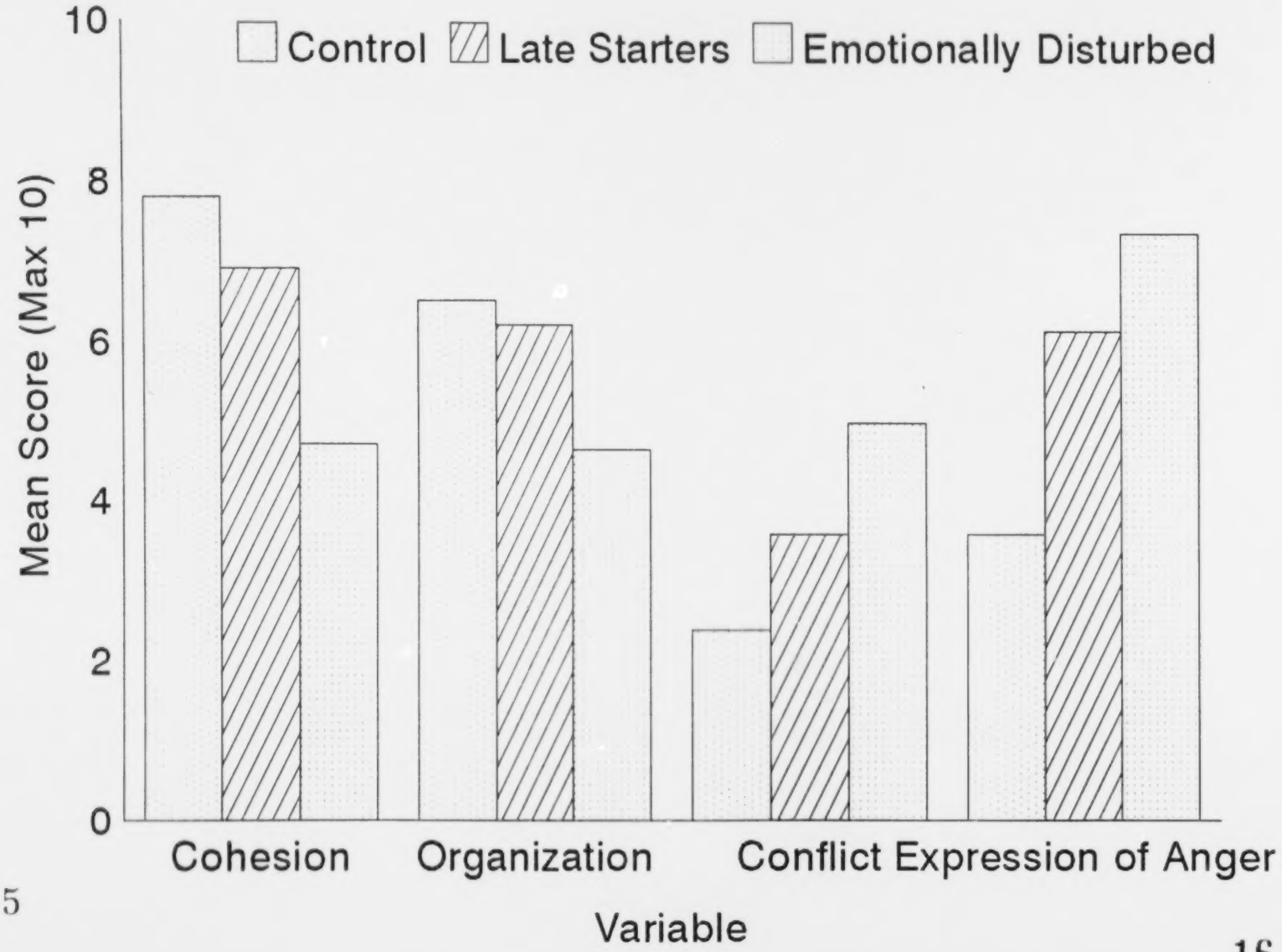

Table 8

Discriminant Analysis Using Measures of CONFLICT, COHESION, CONTROL, ORGANIZ, EXPANGER and GENAGG to Account for Group Membership-Discriminant Function 1

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients		Unstandardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients		Structure Matrix Coefficients	
CONFLICT	-0 44	CONFLICT	-0 20	COHESION	0 80
COHESION	0 46	COHESION	0 20	CONFLICT	-0 71
CONTROL	0 37	CONTROL	0 22	EXPANGER	-0 57
EXPANGER	-0 48	EXPANGER	-0 12	ORGANIZ	0 52
GENAGG	0 29	GENAGG	0 57	CONTROL	0 29
		(CONSTANT)	-1 47	GENAGG	-0 20

Canonical Discriminant Functions Evaluated at Group Centroids (Group Mean)

Group	Function 1	Function 2
1	0 85	-0 18
2	0 01	0 36
3	-0 86	-0 18

Table 9

Classification Table of Results

Actual Group	n	Predicted Group Membership		
		1	2	3
CONTROL GROUP 1	35	26	7	2
		74.3%	20%	5.7%
LATE STARTER GROUP 2	35	13	14	8
		37.1%	40.0%	22.9%
EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED GROUP 3	35	7	9	19
		20.0%	25.7%	54.3%

Percent of "Grouped" Cases Correctly Classified 56.19%